

Economic development is a team sport. And it's never been a particularly partisan issue. That's why we are so concerned about the legislative proposal to strip the governor's power to appoint the head of the lead economic development agency, WEDC. There are many agencies not run by a gubernatorial appointee, but WEDC shouldn't be one of them.

If the head of WEDC isn't a trusted, even central, part of the governor's cabinet, the whole economic development enterprise will suffer. And so will Wisconsin's economy. The best job creation strategies come from bringing people with different outlooks and ideas together to drive Wisconsin forward.

A successful strategy for state economic development will rely on the governor's cabinet for many things. An agency might need to expedite a permit review for an important manufacturer or launch a joint training initiative with an agency like Workforce Development to bring a new employer into our state. Sometimes the governor needs to get on the phone to close a deal or gather the cabinet agencies and direct them to tackle an issue together. Having the head of WEDC working collaboratively with state agencies from day one as a member of the cabinet is the best way to make this happen.

Economic development simply won't work if the leader of WEDC isn't part of the governor's team. Governor Walker knows this. His first instinct in creating WEDC was to make the governor the chair of WEDC's board. It made sense. Economic development works best when it's organized so that the governor can marshal the entire team in service of creating more family-supporting jobs.

Whether the governor and legislature should make changes to the structure of WEDC is an issue they should settle. But the legislature shouldn't strip the governor's power to appoint the quarterback of the economic development team. And if they do, Governor Walker should veto it.

Bill McCoshen, Secretary of Commerce 1994-1998  
Cory Nettles, Secretary of Commerce 2003-2005  
Mary Burke, Secretary of Commerce 2005-2007  
Jack L. Fischer, AIA, Secretary of Commerce 2007-2008  
Dick Leinenkugel, Secretary of Commerce 2008-2010  
Aaron Olver, Secretary of Commerce 2010-2011  
Paul Jadin, CEO of WEDC 2011-2012  
Reed Hall, CEO of WEDC 2012-2015